

# **Not Your Leftovers But Your First Fruits**

Deuteronomy 26:1-12

# GIVE GOD YOUR FIRST FRUITS

- In the text, Moses exhorts the people to offer unto God their first fruits in remembrance and thanksgiving for their inheritance of the new land.
- They have toiled and struggled in the wilderness for many years and have come at long last to the place of divine promise.
- God has been good to them. God has kept his promises and has brought them to a place of great wealth and prosperity.

# EVERYTHING FROM GOD

- The soil is ripe for planting and harvesting.
- The hills and valleys are rich with minerals.
- The water flows like milk and foliage tastes of honey. The sky is blue, the grass is green, and the earth is good.
- Unlike the wilderness whose harsh terrain, lurking dangers, and arid places punish, maim, and discourage God's people, the new land is warm and embracing and full of promise of new life.

# REMEMBER YOUR GOD

- Moses asks the people to remember the blessings of their God and to honour God with the first fruits of their labours.
- This is a fitting tribute to a God who has stood by them, kept them largely from harm's way, and preserved a remnant who could carry forth the dreams and aspirations of their mothers and fathers who perished en route to the new land.
- A proper honour is to offer God their first fruits and not their leftovers.

# HONOUR GOD FIRST

- Moses here is setting the spiritual priorities of the new people in the new land.
- God must be honoured first, for it is God, very God, who has saved them and kept them, promised and renewed them in their painstaking quest for the new frontier.
- God gave them the soil, the seed, the will, and the desire to plant and grow.

# GOD THE GIVER OF EVERYTHING

- God gave them the sun and the rain, the wind and the stars to nurture and keep watch over them.
- God, then, must be honoured with their first fruits and not their leftovers.
- God must be placed first in all things because it is the mercy, grace, providence, and power of God that makes their survival possible and their dreams achievable.

# GIVE GOD NOT OUR LEFTOVERS

- How often today do we give God our leftovers and not our first fruits? God wants our first fruits.
- First, we must give God more than our leftover thoughts and thinking.
- After many years of thinking we think of God only in terms of what he can do for us now and seldom of what we can do for God now and forever.

# GOD OUR FIRST PRIORITY

- “God,” for some, in the words of Harry Emerson Fosdick, is nothing more than “a cosmic bellhop.”
- We push the button and call his name out only when we need him.
- But seldom make reference to him, respect or praise him.
- Do we give him our first thoughts of each waking day.

# WE NEED TO PRIOTIZE GOD

- We have not prioritized God in our thinking.
- We have not made God the ultimate index and reference point for all that we have and all that we do.
- Our thoughts of God are leftover from our other more important thoughts. These divine thoughts emerge “after everything else.”
- They are thoughts of getting and spending, buying and having, needing and wanting. We have not prioritized God in our thinking and doing, so as to give God praise and thanks for the things he has done and does each day.

# VERTICAL RELATIONSHIP

- We fail to remember to thank God for such things as peaceful rest, the fresh air we breathe, the life we have, the food we eat, the health we enjoy, the smell of fresh flowers, the smiles of children, and the laughter of other people.
- Our thinking is too horizontal. We need to orient ourselves vertically in the things of God.

# PEOPLE LIVE AS GOD DOES NOT EXIST

- If we prioritize God in our thinking, God will be more than a leftover thought, and we would give God the first fruits of our minds and our thinking.
- We would reference God, praise God, and thank God for his many blessings.
- A great tragedy in our time, said one writer, is not to ignore, deny or negate God, but to live as though God never existed.

# DURING MOSES' TIME EVERYTHING WAS FROM GOD

- In the days of Moses, the people understood the bounty, mercy, and grace of God.
- In largely agrarian and nomadic communities, dependence on God and acknowledgement of God was direct, for it was God who gave rain and sun. It was God who gave strength to till the soil, and God who steadied weary steps that walked great distances.
- It was God who provided the very sustenance that germinated the crops to grow and gave human energy and strength for the harvest.

# GIVE GOD YOUR FULL TIME

- Moses underscores the importance of the people placing God first in their thinking, for prioritized thinking of God will lead to prioritized action on behalf of God.
- Second, we must give God more than our leftover time. God gives us 168 hours per week.
- How much of that week do we spend in Bible study, devotion, prayer, service to others in the church, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines?
- We give God time we have left over after everything else has been done.

# FIND TIME WITH GOD

- God gives us our most precious resource, which is time, yet we can find little time for God.
- “Everything intercepts us from ourselves,” says Ralph Waldo Emerson.
- We spend our lives in the daily round of getting, doing, and going so that we can scarcely find time for God, to sit in silent meditation and to pray fervent, joyous, or simple prayers.

# WORSHIP GOD ALL THE TIME

- The fury of the present age crowds God out of our daily routine so we have little or no time for God.
- Yet when we need God we expect him to be on-the-spot.
- We make no time for him, yet expect him to give us our undivided attention when we need it!
- We spend a lifetime serving the gods and idols of the larger culture.

# WORSHIPPING OUR MATERIAL POSSESSIONS

- We worship our material possessions, bow down to the emperors in new clothes, believe that money is God, and give only condescending reference to the possibilities of God.
- We do not give God the first fruits of our time
- We spend our time in concert halls, malls, and dance halls, ballparks, theme parks, and water parks, bars, movie theatres, and golf courses, pursuing amusements and bemusements.
- Not that we should not have a good time; not that we should not enjoy ourselves

# WHERE IS YOUR PRIORITY?

- But what about God? What about the God who gives us life and eternal life, the God who makes this life of enjoyment possible?
- Some of us spend more time in front of the television, flicking the remote control, than we do seeking his word and his kingdom.
- Where are our priorities? Because God is an afterthought, we might give God our left over time after everything else in our lives.

# HOW MANY HOURS DO WE GIVE TO GOD

- Out of 168 hours a week, how much time do we spend in devotion, Bible study, prayer, fellowshiping with the saints, and serving others in the church?
- How much time do we spend worshiping, singing, praising, and listening to God?
- One writer said we spend as much time with God as the national anthem before a sports event and our reference to God is like the national anthem.
- It gets things started but is never referred to again throughout the event.

# ACKNOWLEDGE GOD

- We acknowledge God in starting our day but never make reference to him throughout our day.
- Giving God the first fruits of our time means giving God praise in the morning and praise at night.
- It means setting aside our precious time in service to someone else in the name of God.

# STUDY THE WORD OF GOD

- It means disciplining ourselves to seek God in all things and to devote ourselves to studying his word and strengthening the body of Christ in ways that will empower others and give God glory.
- We must give God more than the leftovers of our time.
- Can we not give God some of our temporal time, especially when he gives us eternal time through his Son?

# GIVE GOD MORE THAN YOUR LEFTOVERS

- Third, we must give God more than our leftover money and resources for kingdom building.
- Some people treat God like the paperboy. The paperboy is one of the only persons to give us service on a daily basis but is often the last one paid.
- Everyone else gets paid first, but the paperboy who is up bright and early every morning, faithfully bringing the newspaper to read over breakfast and coffee, is often the last one paid.

# GOD IS NOT A PAPER BOY

- Some people treat God the same way. They pay everyone else first.
- They give their money to the mortgage company, automobile and clothing manufacturers, retail outlets, and superstores.
- They pay 25 percent interest on credit cards to banks and fifteen percent tips for lousy service and horrible-tasting food at restaurants.
- They give enormous sums of money to state lotteries, casinos, liquor and tobacco companies, and hair dressers.

# GOD WANTS FIRST FRUITS

- They spend a fortune on false fingernails, wigs, pedicures, manicures, bowl tickets, and other things, and complain when they are asked to tithe to God's church.
- They enjoy their lives and pay everyone else and just give God and his church credit for all the good things God has done for them.
- God wants more than our credit.
- God wants our first fruits. God wants the first fruit of our tithes.

# Do what the Bible calls you to do

- Why in the midst of unsurpassed prosperity and a booming economy should God's church go wanting and begging just to subsist and survive?
- Because the people have not offered God the first fruits of their earnings but their leftovers after everyone else has been paid.
- The world is always begging for money. The world charges you for everything and the church seldom does.

# Free for everything

- For example, you go to the grocery store and buy your food. You come to the church and eat free.
- You go the psychiatrist for counselling and pay 100 dollars an hour for therapy.
- But you come to the church and receive pastoral counselling for nothing.
- You pay for direct television and cable to access the televangelists and come to the church and get a free sermon.

# No fee at all

- You send all your money to the televangelists and give nothing to your local church.
- Yet if you want counselling or want to bury a family member, you go to the local church.
- You send all your money to the televangelists while your local church goes wanting and begging. The church is not always asking for money.
- The world always has its hand out wanting you to pay for what you get.
- The church seldom asks you to pay for anything you get.

# THE CHURCH SHOULD NEVER BEG

- . But when the church asks for money you exclaim that the church is always begging!”
- But why should God’s church go wanting and begging?
- Why should preachers and leaders even have to ask members to give to the church?
- If every member tithed by giving his first fruits the church would never have to beg members to give to the cause of Christ.
- If God is truly first in our lives, why are so many ministries suffering from lack of finances? “Will a man rob God? You rob me in tithes and offerings,” says God!

# Remember where your bread and butter comes

- Moses understood the value of challenging the people to remember whence cometh their bread and butter.
- He was forthright and direct in urging the people to bring their first fruits and not their leftovers for God.
- God gives us the best of everything he has to offer. He gave us his son. He gives us life and health and vitality.
- He gives us the earth, the sky, and the trees. He gives us tools with which to till the soil and bring forth produce to feed our families.

# Without God we have nothing

- Were it not for the mercy, grace, love, and sustenance of God we would have nothing.
- Therefore it is a fitting tribute to our God, to his church, and to his ministry to bring the first fruits of the harvest — the first fruits of our income, the first fruits of our time, and the first fruits of our thoughts.

# NO LEFTOVERS FOR GOD

- For if we prioritize God in these three things we can continue the prosperity that God has called us into.
- We should give God our first fruits and not our leftovers, for the Lord should be first in all that we give and do for kingdom building in his name.
- God says, “Don’t give me your leftovers. Give me your first fruits!”